Block 2

Social Structures and Practices

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BLOCK 2 INTRODUCTION

The Second block, **Social Structures and Practices** discusses about three different aspects which define society in India. These are **Tribes, Caste and Class**. We explain to you the nature of tribes in India. How they exist and are assimilated in the larger society. The challenges that they face in their day to day lives and their response to these challenges. Caste is another form of social stratification which is unique to Indian society. Unlike caste, class is an open form of social stratification and prior to Independence in India, we found that caste and class were subsumed with one another. However, due to the Colonial impact and especially after Independence when our Constitution was formed, we find that the provisions of our Constitution has led to rapid social mobility in society and this has led to the caste identities and class identities becoming separate from each other in society in India.

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UNIT 3 TRIBES*

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the distinctive characteristics of the tribes in India;
- discuss the socio-economic conditions of tribals;
- explain the agrarian policies, land laws and land alienation among Tribals;
- discuss the regulations and resistance; and
- describe the new kind of struggle on the issue of land.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit on "Changing India" which explained about social change in contemporary India. Here in this unit, we focus on social structure like tribes castes and classes found in India. Here in this unit 3 "Tribes", we have exclusively described the Tribes or "Jan Jati's" in India.

Tribes in India have been studied and written about by many scholars. In this unit we shall discuss some of the major issues concerning the tribal communities in India. They are largely excluded from the mainstream of social life and are often deprived of their indigenous sources of livelihood. They are quite frequently uprooted from their socio-cultural traditions. They experience loss of their dignity and .independence. The government policies have had both negative and positive impact on tribal societies resulting in varying tribal responses to these policies. The great deal of concern among the policy-makers continues to be for the tribal upliftment.

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3.2 UNDERSTANDING TRIBE

Derived from the Latin term *tribus*, the term tribe means an inhabited place. It denotes a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor. The term 'tribe' (Munshi, 2013) was used by the colonial government in India to categorize a large number of groups different from the term caste. The term tribe subsumes communities very different from one another in terms of demographic size, linguistic and cultural traits, ecological conditions and material conditions of living. The tribes are essentially 'primitive', and 'backward' in character. After independence, the term, 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) came to be used to denote tribes who are scheduled as such under the Constitution of India. The tribal communities are distinguished from other communities by relative isolation, cultural distinctiveness and low level of production and subsistence. They are the native inhabitants. There are several terms used for them like 'adivasi' (first settler), 'vanvasi' (inhabitants of forests), 'vanyajati' (primitive people), 'Janjati' (folk people), and 'anusuchit jati' (ST).

W. H. R. Rivers defines tribe as "a social group of a simple kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government and act together for such common purposes as warfare." (Chaudhury, 1977)

The Census of India 2011 notifies Scheduled Tribes in 30 States of India. The number of individual ethnic groups notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705.

Box 3.1: The Tribals and the British Policy

The British policy towards the tribals had two major elements. Firstly, it favoured isolation of the tribal areas from the mainstream (Bhowmick 1980; Chaudhuri 1982). Thus was given the concept of 'excluded' and/or 'partially excluded areas'. Because the British tribal policy was political and colonial, the British administration feared, that if these tribals (bow-and-arrow armed tribals were often labeled as militant, unruly and jungle) were to have contact with the mainstream of Indian society, the freedom movements would gain further strength. In this background it seemed logical to them to isolate, administratively and politically, the regions that had predominantly tribal populations. Secondly, at the level of reform, the British administration was interested in 'civilising' these people. In an ethno-centric assessment, the tribals were viewed at part with stage of bestiality. The classical theory of evolution, which had gripped academic attention in late nineties and early twenties, had treated the 'contemporary primitives' as the remnants or survivals of the early stages of humanity, savagery and barbarism. In the words of Sir, E.B. Tylor, these people inhabiting the hilly or forested terrain with sparse population and difficult communication were 'social fossils'; a study or whom would illuminate the prehistoric phases of human existence (IGNOU (Reprint): 2017 ESO-12 Block 6, Tribes in India)

3.2.1 Distinctive Characteristics of the Tribes in India

1) **Definite common topography**

   Tribal people live within a definite topography and it is a common place for all the members of a particular tribe occupying that region. In the absence of a common but definite living place, the tribals will lose other characteristics of a tribal life, like common language, way of living and community sentiment, etc.

2) **Sense of unity**

Sense of unity is an invariable necessity for a true tribal life. The very existence of a tribe depends upon the tribal's sense of unity during the time of peace and war.

3) **Endogamous group**

Tribal people generally do not marry outside their tribe and marriage within the tribe is highly appreciated and much applauded. But the pressing effects of changes following the forces of mobility have also changed the attitude of tribals and now, inter-tribal marriages are becoming more and more common.

4) **Common dialect**

Members of a tribal community exchange their views in a common dialect. This element further strengthens their sense of unity.

5) **Ties of bloodrelationship**

Bloodrelationship is the greatest bond and most powerful force inculcating the sense of unity among the tribals.

6) **Protection awareness**

Tribal people always need protection from intrusion and infiltration and for this a single political authority is established and all the powers are vested in this authority. The safety of the tribal is left to the skill and mental power of the person enjoying political authority. The tribal chief is aided by a tribal committee in the events of contingencies. Tribe is divided into a number of small groups and each group is headed by its own leader.

7) **Distinct political organisation**

Every tribe has its own distinct political organisation which looks after the interests of tribal people. The whole political authority lies in the hands of a tribal chief. In some tribes, tribal committees exist to help the tribal chief in discharging his functions in the interests of the tribe.

8) **Common culture**

Common culture of a tribe derives from the sense of unity, which depends on sharing a common language, common religion, common political organisation. Common culture produces a life of homogeneity among the tribals.

9) **Importance of kinship**

Kinship forms the basis of tribal social organisation. Most tribes are divided into exogamous clans and lineages.

10) **Egalitarian values**

The tribal social organisation is based on the principle of equality. Thus there are no institutionalised inequalities such as in the caste system or sex

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based inequalities. Thus men and women enjoyed equal status and freedom. However, some degrees of social inequality may be found in case of tribal chiefs or tribal kings who enjoy a higher social status, exercise political authority and posses wealth.

11) **Simple form of religion**

Tribes believe in certain myths and a rudimentary type of religion. Further, they believe in totems-which is at symbolic object signifying objects having mystic relationship with members of the tribe.

Check Your Progress I

i) Give the definition of tribe. Use about five lines for your answer

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ii) List at least two major characteristic of tribes.

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3.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TRIBALS IN CENTRAL INDIA

The tribal communities, especially in the central belt of India, are characterised by declining access to land and other resources due to land alienation and increased diversion of forest and other common property resources for development projects. As a result, a disproportionately high percentage of the tribal population has been displaced from their traditional pattern of livelihood without proper rehabilitation. (Sarap, 2017)

Of the total 104.3 million people belonging to various tribes (705), about four-fifths live in the heart of India comprising the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and West Bengal (Government of India, 2011). The socio-economic conditions of the tribals living in these states are, in several ways, different from those living in northeast India. That is, since these are predominantly forest-based areas with high concentration of poverty, the tribals in these regions stand, both socially and economically at a much lower level as compared to those in northeast India. The problem of poverty confronting them is multidimensional in nature including income, and human vulnerability. (Kannan & Raveendran, 2011; Radhakrishna 2015, and Sarap, 2017).

The adivasis living in the hinterland of the states are characterised by low level of asset holding, low level of human capital, lack of political participation in the decision-making process and no political voice (De Haan & Dubey, 2005). In addition, they are subjected to multiple deprivations (Bakshi, Chawla & Shah, 2015) and human vulnerability. (Sarap, 2017). Major causes of tribal poverty are lack of access to secure productive resources, such as land, forests, other common property resources like grazing grounds, ponds, tanks etc. Most important is their insufficient participation in the decision-making process**.** The loss of entitlement to resources has not only affected their livelihood but also made them poorer. There is continuous erosion in their access to different types of resources on which the tribals depend for their livelihood. The level of poverty among the tribal communities central India is higher as compared to other regions. (Radhakrishna, Ravi & Reddy, 2013). They are marginalised because of **land alienation and indebtedness** (Sarap, 2017). There is distress sale of their agricultural and forest products by middlemen to the local traders. Even the tribal labour as marketed (Sarap & Springate-Baginski, 2013). The **state-sponsored programmes** have poor performance in tribal areas. Their performance in forms of human development like health education and training is ineffective (govt. of India 2014). The **literacy rate** among tribal communities is rising but at a slow pace, as compared to other communities in other nations. (Sarap, 2017) There is difference in the levels of literacy among different tribal communities in addition to the difference between male and female literacy rates of tribal people. The health indicators like infant mortality, morbidity, skilled health care, are the worst. **Female-headed households** can be seen amongst tribed community. The **child poverty and disadvantage based by women are very high.** The women themselves suffer from multiple burdens of being located in remote areas in disadvantaged groups. They receive insufficient access to education and quality of health care (De Haan 2004) The World Bank, 2011). The tribal households tend to be poorer inspite of various welfare programmes and some changes in their demographic, occupational and educational levels. (Kijima, 2006). The tribal dominated areas in central India are characterised by poor access to roads, markets, medical and educational facilities. The infrastructural deprivation of tribal areas increases both transportation and transaction costs of production and marketing of commodities, and creates difficulty in accessing basic services for the tribal people. The remoteness of tribal areas precipitates their commercial and transnational problems. This reduces the possibility of the transformation of tribal economy. Given the low agricultural productivity and low returns for their labour (Kijima, 2006, see Sarap, 2017), the net surplus available to the tribal people is marginal or negative**.** The adivasi regions are rich in mineral and other resources but, historically, the tribal communities have been denied a share of this wealth. Such resources are owned by them as they are found under the land they possess but they are excluded from the use of small resources. They are not permitted to extract minerals and water resources for power generation and irrigation. As a result, they have been displaced and subjected to 'adverse incorporation', which has pushed them to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy (Chatterjee, 2008). In tribal areas, there is absolute deprivation as a result of loss of land and habitats, and from the fragmentation of homesteads due to dams, mines and industries (Munshi, 2012, see Sarap, 2017). These adverse changes have led to dispossession of individuals and communities. There is also the relative deprivation resulting from lack of opportunities, that is, social exclusion from the processes and benefits of developmental programmes.

There are number of factors including policies, as discussed below, responsible for decline in the conditions of livelihood of the tribal communities.

3.3.1 Issues Relating to Access to Livelihood

Access to the source of livelihood of the tribal people depends on sectoral institutional and governmental (supports). They should not only improve their sources of livelihood but also facilitate mainstreaming i.e bringing them closer to other people and integration of tribal communities with other communities and societies. There is also a need to enhance their capacities. The governmental policies including agrarian, forest and development policies are crucial for providing these communities with opportunities for their sustainable socio-economic development (De Haan & Dubey, 2005)

3.3.2 Agrarian Policies, Land Laws and Land Alienation among Tribals

The land as a major source of livelihood plays a direct and an indispensable role in agricultural production and prosperity but the agrarian policies of the states have been relatively ineffective in broadening the access to this source of livelihood to a large section of tribal population. The reason can be attributed to the fact that post independent. Indian states have encouraged private property regime but the state property regime continued and the communal land tenure system was not accepted. As a result, land not settled as private property automatically became state property which included forestland also (Ekha, 2011; Kumar & Kherr, 2013; Sarap & Sarangi, 2010). Although the forestland was primarily owned by the tribal communities. In many adivasi areas, requisite surveys were never done. Thus, people's rights over vast tracts of land were never recognized, though the land was customarily owned by these tribal communities (Xaxa,2007, Sarap,2017). Further, the increasing pauperisation and marginalisation of peasantry has been affecting the livelihood of the tribals. The National Sample Survey Office data shows an increasing trend of landlessness among the tribal households, leading to their pauperisation. The percentage of households without any cultivated land (landlessness) has been increasing. It is noteworthy that the percentage of households that do not have cultivated or agricultural land increased from 28 per cent in 1987–88 to 39 per cent in 2011–12 (Karat & Rawal, 2014). Similarly, adivasi households that do not possess any land have increased from 13 to 25 per cent and such households that do not own any land have increased from 16 to 24 per cent during the same period (Sarap, 2017).

Check Your Progress II

i) Discuss briefly the socio-economic conditions of tribals from central India. Use five lines

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ii) Do the tribals in central India have access to forest land?

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3.4 TRIBES AND FOREST

Some tribal groups practice hunting and food gathering as their sole occupation but majority of them are cultivators and agricultural labourers. The rest are engaged in household industry, construction work, plantation, mining and quarrying and in other services. A small section of them receives benefits from the protective measures of the government, such as, reservation in educational institutions, employment and political reservation but majority of them are marginalized by the process of so-called development of the last seven decades since independence (Munshi ibid).

Most tribal groups derive their livelihood from agriculture and forest as compared to non-tribal agricultural communities. Their dependence on the forest serves variety of purposes. The dependency on forest and other natural resources is substantial. Their agricultural activities are closely interlinked with the forest. The forest has been, and continues to be, a major source of food, timber for house construction and agricultural implements, fuel wood, medicines, and other necessities of everyday life. The leaves, fruits, flowers, roots, tubers from the forest constitute an important supplement to the otherwise meager diet of the tribals, especially during the lean season and periods of drought. Wild fruits, berries and honey are collected and eaten. The bamboo and timber are necessary for making agricultural and fishing tools. The herbs serve as serve as medicines for several ailments; The oil and soap are also gathered from the forest. Around fifty to eighty percent of food requirements of the tribals may, in fact, be provided by the forest. The sale of forest produce like bamboo, fuel wood, *tendu* leaves (leaves plucked from its shrubs used to wrap *bidi*/*cigarette*) and variety of nuts are important sources of income. The tribal people have the belief that gods and spirits reside in the forest, trees and animals. They are also their object of devotion. The forest resources are the major sources of material and spiritual existence of tribal communities (ibid).

There are several regulations passed in the mid-nineteenth century during the colonial rule; with the object to protect and regenerate forests for ecological reasons and to facilitate the production of timber on a sustainable basis, for both revenue and imperial purposes. The laws relating to the management of forests and forest produce were subsequently consolidated in the **Indian Forest Act of 1927.** This resulted in the large scale restriction on the removal of fuel wood and bamboos and prohibition of shifting cultivation. In many instances, grazing lands were included into ‘unreserved’ and ‘protected’ forests, thereby seriously affecting the existing grazing arrangements. The creation of a large scale of 'reserved' forests in India under the control of the state, supervised and managed by the forest department resulted in the restriction of the customary rights of the forest communities endangering their very survival. These communities suffered great hardships at the hands of forest officials who enforced the restrictions with great severity and even a minor breach of regulation was treated as a crime.

The forest management introduced by the British resulted in the enhanced commercial value of the forest and opened up an important source of revenue for the government. The increasing demand from urban centers, military cantonments and hill stations, from the railways, and the rising commercial value of teak and other minor forest produce added to the economic value of the forests. The increased policing by the forest department inevitably resulted in more and more forest crimes and offences being committed by those dependent on the forest.

The land and forest under tribal control were brought under state control and management. During the colonial rule and after independence, lineage/ village ownership of land was not recognised. In addition, the non-recognition of shifting agriculture as a legitimate agricultural practice existed except in the north east. Paradoxically, the post colonial Indian state has continued with the colonial policy with the result that lakhs of shifting cultivators have no legitimate rights over the forests that have been their own for centuries.

The traditional rights of the tribal people over land and forest were neither recognised nor recorded. The creation of national parks and sanctuaries on forest lands further excluded these communities from their survival base. The conservation of the flora and fauna was recognised as an urgent need but the settlement of tribal rights to forest and its produce was not undertaken with sincerity and seriousness that it deserved and those who continue to use forest land were deemed 'encroachers', stripped of any security rights (ibid).

3.4.1 Loss of Land and Livelihood

There was loss of the source of livelihood since the tribals were kept away from the shifting cultivation as it was considered wasteful and destructive but the British government considered it as a source of regular revenue, and therefore, the tribals were encouraged to take up land for cultivation but on lower rates of assessment. However, the lack of agricultural implements, poor quality of soil, frequent crop failure and rigid revenue demands, often forced the cultivators, both tribals and non-tribals, to turn to money lenders to provide them with money at high rates of interest to buy seeds, consumption items, and even money to pay revenue to the government. in several parts, the trend of increasing indebtedness and transfer of land for cultivation to the money-lending classes increased. In this way, a powerful class emerged which amassed large amounts of land and wealth through combined activities of money-lending, trading and liquor selling. This trend reduced the tribals to the position of bonded labourers and tenants. Thus, from a low subsistence, the tribals became totally dependent on the landlord – money lenders, traders, shopkeepers, for their survival. The **exploitation and oppression** by the money-lending class not only reduced them to extreme poverty but also removed their self respect.

3.4.1.1 Loss of Land and Livelihood in Pre-Independent India

The necessary pre-condition for the dependence and bondage was the alienation of the adivasis from their means of subsistence, forest and land and other resources. Their alienation was almost complete by the end of the 19th century. In many parts of the country, the tribals joined the non-tribals to revolt against the local oppressors and administrators. They demanded land, forest rights, lower taxes, lower prices for food etc. In spite of the legislations preventing alienation amomg the tribals, they continue to lose their land and the sources of their livelihood.

3.4.1.2 Loss of Land and Livelihood in Post-Independent India

The decade following Independence were the decades of intense development planning in India. This was also the time of marginalization of tribal communities from mainstream development through the agenda of nation building centered around industrialisation and urbanisation. What accompanied this process was building of large dams, large industrial complexes, infrastructure, opening of mines and forest for the market and over exploitation of natural resources to satisfy the expanding urban and industrial demands in the tribal inhabited areas where most of the rich natural resources lie. The adverse effect this process on tribals in India has been reported by the International Alliances of Indigenous Peoples of the Tropical Forests. It was reported that the building of industries, mines, townships, dams, forest depots was both by decision and default imposed on the tribal people. The tribal communities carried the burden of the economic growth of the nation. The land acquisition, a piece of colonial legislation, used to acquire lands for the Crown. It was the power as a tool in the hands of the colonial state to take over the resources to divert their benefits to the advanced and advancing sections (Munshi 2013). More than 10 million people were displaced and lost all that they had and millions of tribal communities to the brink of ethnocide. There was a simmering discontent in almost the entire middle Indian found themselves pushed to the brink in the tribal belt, particularly on the issues of land and forest and their alienation from these. In some cases there was a near confrontation between the people and the state marked by intermittent eruption of violence. The tribal people are continuously losing command over their resources in almost all counts with utter disregard of their traditional rights over land and national resources. There was virtually forced displacement in favour of a variety of development projects (Munshi , 2013).

The public and private sectors undertakings, development projects and industries have contributed to the process of impoverishment of the tribals. The state which is supposed to protect their interest has immensely contributed to their exploitation. The depletion and destruction of forest have eroded the already fragile survival base of the tribal communities. The most affected are the tribal women who must now work harder to meet the fuel, water, food and fodder requirements of the family and their cattles. A large number of tribals are forced to migrate seasonally or permanently to other rural areas, urban fringes, or cities in search of work opportunities because of being deprived of their traditional sources of their livelihood. They constitute a large army of ‘footloose workers, a part of the expanding unorganised sector, with little security and protection (ibid).

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It is noteworthy that the situation in the north-east tribal belt differs from that of central and southern India. Except Tripura, Assam and Manipur, this region did not experience much migration even in colonial days. Athough in more recent times, alienation of land and other resources has occurred. But it is not as widespread as in the rest of the country, in particular by the central tribal belt. The tribals in this region, according to Pathy, control the resources for their survival. The tribals are in majority in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. They struggle here also but they have little to do with land alienation and expropriation of resources by the state. They focus more on their political involvement. (ibid).

The policy of globalisation and liberalisation has only accelerated the process of alienation of the tribals from their natural resources and created greater insecurity for them. The free movement of human resources, commodities, finance and technology across national, regional and local boundaries have adversely affected these communities. It is observed that large scale transfer of tribal land is going on. This alienates them from their land. There is now a move to amend the fifth schedule and structure of forest management projects in order to include the interests of large private firms like the Indian Tobacco company in Andhra Pradesh. The Jindals have procured tribal land through *benami* transactions in Chhattisgarh for their steel plant. The Sahara Housing Limited grabbed 3,760 acres of tribal and forest areas in Maharastra for a tourism project. (ibid).

The government has effectively carried out a massive eviction of tribal people in order to clear the way for the big multinational mining companies and their Indian partners, who are coming to India to exploit its iron-ore, coal, bauxite uranium and other bio-diversity. The Odisha government has already given mining rights for iron and steel production to 35 companies, including a grant to POSCO and to large number of aluminium companies. Mining and quarrying has recently attracted a lot of attention. It has emerged as a major profit-making industry often combining force and fraud, legal and illegal means to carry out its activities. Although, mining areas are the site of violent political clashes between the local people on the one hand, and the private capital and the state on the other. The ecological destruction, loss of traditional livelihood of tribals and their displacement have taken place. Chhattisgarh is one such site which has witnessed clashes between the local people and police. In fact, this place has also seen the massive state repression to crush the Maoist influence in the region. It is reported that in the first four and half decades after independence, mining had displaced about two and a half crore people, and less than 25 per cent of them had yet been rehabilitated. More than 50 per cent belonged to tribal communities. It was estimated that 1,64 lakh hectares of forest land has already been diverted for mining in the country (ibid).

The tribals protests led by Maoists have brought to the centre stage the problems of continuing illegal acquisition of land from scheduled areas by private interests as well as the state, and the resulting alienation of tribal communities from their resource base. The areas most politically volatile are those which are forested and rich in other natural resources, and which have been home for tribal communities (ibid).

Box 3.2: Impact of Industrialisation

The installation of industries in Santal dominated areas was another very important factor of change and modernisation. These industries provided jobs to both educated and illiterate and offered a new source of mobility. Moreover, these industries were free from one or another or religious domination. They promoted caste-free and class-free occupation. A large number of Santal found jobs in them. These industries, having recruited local tribals; provided an opportunity to the people to further cement their traditional linkages: in fact, these industries were the 'world of kinsmen'. Santal identity was further strengthened by the tribal-workers.

The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution grants tribals complete rights over their traditional land and forests and prohibits private companies from mining on their land. Only a small number of tribals have benefitted from the welfare measures of the state. A small proportion of young adivasi men and women do not want to continue with their traditional lifestyle but majority of the tribals feel they are deprived of their traditional sources of livelihoods against their wishes. They are forced to take up employment which offer them little security and quality of life.

Thus, millions of tribals have been displaced in the last few decades making way for development projects, industrial activities, forest conservation and the processes of development to proceed unhindered. However, these developments are but all at the cost of tribals. The short-sighted policies of the states have resulted in destruction of natural resources and displacement.The experiences of the tribal communities can best be described as the 'loss of nerve.' After displacement, the resettlement of the tribals is a painful experience because the conditions in the resettlement sites are often so abysmal that the majority of the tribal people want to return to their villages, kin group, forest areas where they may feel satisfied. They may also like to move out of resettlement to work as casual labour in plantation and industries and as domestic servants, rickshaw-pullers and construction workers in the alien surroundings (Munshi ibid).

3.4.2 Regulations and Resistance

There has been, of late, a growing awareness of the environmental problems facing the country, especially the depletion of our forest resources. The conflict and tension is growing among contending tribal groups because of deprivation and lack of access to resources and power. (Guha, R. 2013).

The task of fullfillment of tribal 'rights; and the loss of their control over their natural resources have evoked a sharp reaction from the tribal forest communities. There have been revolts in different tribal areas centered around the question of forests since the early days of forest administration. For instance, in Garhwal, the **reservation of forests in 1913** was followed by extensive **social movements in 1916** and **1921**, coinciding with the first non-cooperation movement, engulfing large areas of Garhwal and Kumaon. These upsurges forced the government to de-reserve large forest areas. The discontent among the tribal people due to forest restrictions manifested in the unwillingness of the villagers to cooperate with the Forest Department in its task of forest conservation (ibid).

The state in many areas has made over some forests as village forests under the settlement for the use by villagers but the loss of community ownership of forests had effectively broken the link between man and forest. This alienation of man from forest can be compared to the alienation of the primary producer being separated from the means of production as conceived by Karl Marc. As a result, there were sporadic forest movements in Tehri Garhwal since the early years of the century. This history of conflict and struggle can be seen essentially as emanating from alienation, property rights and obligation (ibid).

3.4.3 New Kind of Struggle on the Issue of Land

A new form of struggle on the issue of land has started within some of the tribal communities where the tribal women are struggling to gain ownership rights to land. The denial of land rights to tribals/ adivasi women has been a matter of great concern. The studies by Kishwar on Ho tribal community (1987:200) argue that Ho men's increasing control over land and other income generation activities has resulted in 'greater exploitation of Ho women despite women's far greater contribution to the family's livelihood. There are instances of tribal women like the Santhals of Bihar who are supported by men from the tribal community to launch a campaign to fight for their right to land (Munshi 2013).

3.4.4 Tribal 'Unrest'

With increased forest exploitation, the forest tribal communities have experienced a progressive loss of their control over their habitat. This deprivation can be observed in a series of social movements. There has been intermittent uprisings in the fifties and sixties. Currently we find 'unrest' in most areas. These movements, ranging from Uttarakhand in the north to Jharkhand in the east and Thane/ Dhulia in the west, have been studied and reported. The increasingly militant struggles have centered around the question of regaining community control over land and forest. The state's reaction has been one of increased repression and the use of armed force to suppress these movements as was the case of the Gua firings of 1980. The state has given greater powers to armed forces, forest department and police bureaucracy (Guha, R.2013).

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Check Your Progress III

i) Briefly explain the major livelihood awareness of tribal people in India. Use ten lines

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ii) How did the processes of globalisation affect the tribals living in the forests?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you came to know the conditions of tribals in India. The meaning and characteristic of tribes was described .They have their own myths, lengends, problems and the sense of identity with the natural resources. We explained how the developmental programmes have adversely affected the tribal communities, including their traditional pattern of agriculture and natural sources of their livelihood. The demarcation of fencing of large tracts of reserved forest has enforced effective loss of control by the tribal forest-dwellers over their habitat and resources of their existence. The development of tribal communities and their natural resources base, their skills, practices, traditions, knowledge, aptitudes and wishes.

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3.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

i) i) The term tribe derives from the Latin word "tribers" which refers to an inhabited place. It singnifies a group of persons who belong to a community claiming a common descent from a common ancestor…….

They all share the same language, cultural distinctiveness and relative isolation.

ii) A sense of unity and a common dialect are two major characteristics of tribes.

Check Your Progress II

i) Tribal people especially belonging to central India faced land alienation and disruption of their traditional pattern of livelihood in the very process of development since large projects such as industrial and mining led to their access to land being barred from them.

ii) No the tribals in Central India lost their traditional rights over the access to forest land during the colonial period as well as the contemporary times.

Check Your Progress III

i) Some tribals were living on hunting and food gathering but a majority population were cultivators and agricultural labourers. Many were engaged in household industry, mining work, plantation etc.

ii) In pose-Independent India the processes of globalisation and liberalisation adversely affected the tribals whose customary rights on forest lands was lost wich left them deprived and pauperized and alienated from their environment. They were either working as labourers/miners/domestics etc. or were forced to migrate to the cities and other regions looking for source of livelihood.

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UNIT 4 CASTE*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Features of Caste System
    4.2.1 Segmental Division of Society
    4.2.2 Hierarchy
    4.2.3 Restrictions on Feeding and Social Interaction
    4.2.4 Civil and Religious Disabilities and Privileges of Different Sections
    4.2.5 Restrictions on Marriage
    4.2.6 Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation
4.3 Theoretical Approaches to the Understanding of Caste
    4.3.1 Caste and Class
    4.3.2 Jajmani System
4.4 Change and Continuity within Caste System
    4.4.1 Caste and Politics
    4.4.2 Measures to Prohibit Caste Discrimination
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 References
4.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit; you should be able to:

- define caste and describe its features;
- discuss the theoretical approaches to the understanding of caste;
- describe Jajmani system and its association with caste system;
- discuss major changes and the elements of continuity in the caste system;
- explain Caste system's influence on Indian political system; and
- discuss the measures taken to reduce caste discrimination.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Caste is a system of social stratification. It lies at the roots of Indian social structure. It involves ranking according to birth and determines one's occupation, marriage and social relationships. There is a prescribed set of norms, values and sanctions which govern social behaviour within caste.

Sociologists have defined caste (locally referred to as "jati") as 'hereditary, endogamous group, which is usually localised. It has a traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concepts of pollution and purity, and general maximum commensality that occurs within the caste" (Srinivas 1962). This is the definition of the ideal form of caste system. In reality, however, there are variations in the structure and functioning of caste system.

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* Dr. Shailey Bhashanjali

It is imperative to make a distinction between the theoretical formulation of caste system and its existential reality. Theoretically, caste stratification of the Indian society has its origin in the Varna system. This system literally means colour which was prevalent during the Vedic period. According to this doctrine of colour, the Hindu society was divided into four main Varnas : Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. A fifth category of untouchables lie outside the fold of the varna scheme. This was mainly based on division of labour and occupation. Members of each varna performed different functions like the priestly function rulers, fighters, traders and servile. The varna system is important because it provides an all-India macro structural scheme within which innumerable variations of castes are found. A varna may include different castes which may be divided into different sub-castes.

The concept of Varna is generally traced to the *Purusha Sukta* Verse system of the Rig Veda. It said that Varna system originated by the sacrifice of the primeval being or Purusha. After the sacrifice, the Brahmana emerged from the mouth, the Kshatriya from arms, the Vaishya from thighs, and the Sudra from the feet. Thus, the four Varnas that emerged were considered to have a divine origin.

4.2 FEATURES OF CASTE SYSYTEM

Ghurye (1962) an eminent sociologist, identified six features of caste system. These six features are:

4.2.1 Segmental Division of Society

The Hindu society is divided into different castes. Caste membership is determined by birth and not by selection and accomplishments. Hence, caste status is termed as being ascribed (by birth).

4.2.2 Hierarchy

Caste system has a specific scheme of social preference in which they are arranged in a social and ritual hierarchy. A sense of high and low, superiority and inferiority is associated with this gradation or ranking. The Brahmins are placed at the top of the hierarchy and are regarded as ritually pure or supreme. The untouchables, considered most impure, are at the lowest rung of the hierarchy. In between are the Kshatriyas, followed by the Vaishya. Thus, castes occupy a specific status in the overall framework of caste hierarchy.

4.2.3 Restrictions on Feeding and Social Interaction

Rules are laid down which govern the exchange of food which is also called commensality and social interaction between different castes. There are restrictions on the kind of food that can be eaten together, received or exchanged among castes. A Brahmin will accept "pakka" food, i.e., food prepared in 'ghee' from any community but he cannot accept 'kachcha' food i.e food prepared in water at the hands of other caste. Concept of pollution places severe restrictions on the extent of social interaction.

4.2.4 Civil and Religious Disabilities and Privileges of Different Sections

Each caste is considered to be more pure or impure than the other in the ritual sense of the term. The ideology of pollution and purity regulates the relationship between different castes significantly. There are several taboos practised by the superior castes to preserve their ceremonial purity.

Castes considered ritually impure were subjected to manifold disabilities. For example, they were forbidden to use public roads, public well or enter Hindu temples. The shadow of some castes were considered polluting, such as, in Tamil Nadu the Shanars or Toddy-tappers had to restrict their pace away to 24 steps from a Brahmin during the earlier times.

Each caste has its own customs, traditions, practices and rituals. It has its own informal rules, regulations and procedures.

4.2.5 Restrictions on Marriage

Endogamy or marriage within one's own caste or sub-caste is an essential feature of caste system. Generally, people get married within their own caste or sub-caste. However, there were a few exceptions. In some regions of India, the upper caste men could marry lower caste women. This kind of marriage alliance is known as hypergamy.

4.2.6 Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation

Traditionally each caste was associated with an occupation. They were ranked higher and lower on the basis of ritual purity and pollution of their associated occupation. The Brahmins who occupied the uppermost rank were prescribed the duties of acquiring and teaching sacred knowledge and of performing sacrifices.

The above is a description of the essential features of caste system. However caste structure has several variations as found in its functioning in different regions of India. As a regional reality, one can see different patterns of caste-ranking, customs and behaviours, marriage rules and caste dominance.

Each caste had its own caste council or panchayat where the grievances of its caste members were heard. Caste panchayat was regulating the behaviour of the caste people according to the prescribed norms and sanctioned social behaviour. Headed by the elders of that caste, these councils had the power to ex-communicate a member if he did not follow caste restrictions. They are distinct from village *panchayats* in that the latter, as statutory bodies, serve all villagers regardless of caste, although they operate on the same principles

Box 4.1

Dumont is critical of those who tried to explain caste in terms of politico-economic factors where caste was seen as a system of domination and exploitation. He, for example, criticizes F.G. Bailey, who in his book on 'Caste and the Economic Frontier' (based on his field work in Orissa), has argued that there was a high degree of coincidence between politico-economic ranks and the ritual ranking of caste. This is a reflection of the general rule that those who achieve wealth and political power tend to rise in the ritual scheme of ranking. It is what is meant by saying that the ranking system of caste groups was validated by differential control over the productive resources of the village.

4.3 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF CASTE

Let us examine the attributional and interactional approach employed by scholars to the understanding of the caste system.

i) The attributional approach to caste analyses caste in terms of the various immutable characteristics of caste. The sociologists such as G S Ghurye, J H Hutton, using this approach, define caste system through its significant features. The above section includes the six features of caste system as described by Ghurye.

In his book ‘Caste in India’, (Hutton) held that the central feature of the caste system is endogamy. Around this fact various restrictions and taboos are built up. The interaction among various castes do not violate these restrictions placed on the various castes. Another important feature of the caste system as seen by Hutton is the taboo on taking cooked food from other than their own castes. M N Srinivas chooses to study the structure of relations arising between castes on the basis of these attributes. Thus, he introduces a dynamic aspect of caste identity.

ii) Interactional approach takes into account how castes are actually ranked with respect to one another in a local empirical context. According to Bailey caste dynamics and identity are united by the two principles of segregation and hierarchy. He feels that “Castes stand in ritual and secular hierarchy expressed in the rules of interaction”. By secular hierarchy he meant the economic and political hierarchy, rituals being part of the religious system. The ritual system overlaps the political and economic system. Bailey (1957) explained his viewpoint with reference to village Bisipara in Orissa. He has shown how the caste situation in Bisipara is changed and becomes more fluid after Independence when the Kshatriyas lost much of their land. This caused a downslide in their ritual ranking as well. There was a clearly discernable change in the interaction patterns, such as, the acceptance and non-acceptance of food from other castes.

Marriot studied the arrangement of caste ranking in ritual interaction. He confirmed that ritual hierarchy is itself linked to economic and political hierarchies. Usually economic and political ranks tend to coincide. That is to say both ritual and non-ritual hierarchies affect the ranking in the caste order though ritual hierarchies tend to play a greater role.

Dumont added a new dimension to the study of caste in an interactional perspective. According to him the local context has a role in caste ranking and identity, but this is a response to the ideology of hierarchy which extends over the entire caste system. For Dumont caste is a special type of inequality and hierarchy is the essential value underlying the caste system. It is this value that integrates Hindu society .The various aspects of the caste, says

Dumont are based on the principle of opposition between the pure and impure underlying them. ‘Pure’ is superior to the ‘impure’ and has to be kept separate.

Box 4.2

The effect of this participation on caste as an adaptive institution is clearly two fold: a conservative one on the internal social organisation of caste which will tend to preserve its integrity to mobilise more effectively; and a more creative one in its external relations to other castes as they attempt to maximise their share of scarce resources to power, prestige and wealth, and evolve a “civil politics of primordial compromise”. For the very interdependence brought about by the market economy and democratic politics gives groups the power of contravailing the objectives of the others. The first effect will tend to conserve caste loyalties, the second to create broader ones. Thus Lynch concludes: “The very process of modernisation itself brings forth and exacerbates the competing loyalties of citizenship and caste statutes in the struggle of a new state to become a nation.”

The theoretical position of caste in the analysis of Indian social systems is highly complex. It constitutes both a structural unit of social stratification as well as a system. The distinction between the two would depend upon the level of analysis involved. Sociologists who look across the cultural view of caste have, right from the beginning, associated it with an autonomous principle of stratification the bases of which are; institutionalised inequality, closure of social system in respect of social mobility, an elementary level of division of labour legitimized on ritual bases of reciprocity, and emphasis on quality (ritual purity or racial purity) rather than performance. In other words, caste is associated with an autonomous form of cultural system or world-view. The history of this view of caste goes far back in sociological literature (see Dubois 1906; Nesfield 1885: O'Malley 1932; Weber 1952; Kroeber 1930 etc.) and the trend still continues (see Berreman 1967; Barth 1960; Davis 1951; Myrdal 1968; etc.).The important assumption merely a variant of the principle of stratification which may be found working, not only in India, but in other societies too. An important implication of this view, as we find in the writings of Davis, A.R. Desai (1966) and Bose (1968) and others is that being a structural reality i.e. being part of the social structure caste would disappear when society in India evolves to a higher level (see Singh 1968) of industrialisation. A simple understanding of the structural view of caste is that it forms an ideal type of stratification system and as such it could exist forever, either alone or in coexistence with other forms of stratification in societies. This viewpoint is held by sociologists who take a structural-functional rather than evolutionary-historical view of social stratification. (Singh, Yogendra 1997. pp.32)

Thus a distinction can be made between sociologists who treat caste as a cultural phenomenon and those who define it as a structural phenomenon. Each of these positions has a further subvariation based on one's view of caste: whether it is a particularistic phenomenon, Indian in substance, or whether it has universal properties. Thus four approaches emerge as logical classes once we distinguish between the two levels of theoretical formulation, that is, cultural and structural and universalistic and particularistic.

4.3.1 Caste and Class

In Indian society, caste and class as two different forms of social stratification have often been found to overlap with each other. Yogendra Singh (1997) mentions that in India class is often subsumed by caste. While caste is perceived as a hereditary group, a social class is a category of people who share a similar socio-economic status in relation to other segments of their community or society. Andre Beteille (1965), on the basis of his study of caste and class in Sripuram in South India found that the relation between caste and class has been a dynamic one. In the traditional system, there was greater congruence between caste and class. But the class system has gradually been dissociating itself from the caste structure. One can now achieve a variety of class positions with different degrees of probability, whatever one's position in the caste structure may be. However, caste, class are also closely linked with the power structure which is reflected in terms of the ownership in ship of property, such as, land and political and economic standing in society.

Activity 1

From your discussion with your family/friends make a list of characteristics which you believe to be related to caste. Discuss with other students at your study center.

4.3.2 Jajmani System

The term Jajmani System was introduced into the Indian social anthropology by William Wiser (1937) through his pioneering work, 'The Hindu Jajmani System'. In his study of a village in Uttar Pradesh, he discovered how different castes interacted with one another in the production and exchange of goods and services. It was found that, with some variations, this system existed throughout India.

Based on the agricultural system of production and distribution of goods and services, Jajamani system is the link between the landowning high caste groups and occupational castes. It could be said that the Jajmani system is a system of distribution whereby high caste land owning families are provided services by various lower castes such as carpenter, barber, sweeper, etc.

It is a system of economic, social and ritual ties between different caste groups in the village. Under this system there are patrons and service castes. Since caste has a traditional association with an occupation, the castes are interdependent on each other for securing multiple services.

The servicing castes are called Kamins while the castes served are called Jajmans. For services rendered, the servicing castes are paid in cash or in kind (grains, fodder, clothes, animal products like milk, butter, etc.). The Rajput, Bhumihar and Jat are the Patron castes in the North and Kamma, Reddi, and Lingayat in the South. The service castes comprise barber, carpenter, blacksmith, washermen, leather-worker, etc. Relationship under Jajmani was permanent and hereditary. Oscar Lewis mentions that each caste group within a village is traditionally bound to give certain standardised services to the families of other castes. While the landowning high caste families receive services from lower castes and, in return, the members of low castes receive grains.

Jajmani system has undergone many significant changes in the past decades. In the village, not every caste participates in this system. In addition to the jajmani relation, there has always been contractual, wage labour type of ties between the providers of goods and services and their buyers. Introduction of cash economy has also brought about changes, because payments in the jajmani system were in kind rather than in cash. New opportunities have come up in towns and cities, and many occupational castes have moved to cities to participate in these opportunities. The influence of life style, modern education, improved transport and communication has led to a decline in Jajmani system. Barter system of exchange is now almost extinct. Now payment is made in the form of cash. Broad changes in the caste system have also come in the way of the functioning of the traditional institution of Jajmani system.

Check Your Progress I

i) Define caste and mention at least three features of caste system in India.

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ii) What is the meaning of attributional approach towards the understanding of caste? Use five lines to answer.

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4.4 CHANGE AND CONTINUITY WITHIN CASTE SYSTEM

By definition, caste system is viewed as a rigid and closed system of stratification. That is there is no movement or mobility from one caste status to the other. Social mobility is the process by which individuals or groups move, either upwards or downwards, from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. In reality, social mobility has been an important feature of caste system. This clearly means that caste system is a dynamic reality with flexibility in terms of its structure and function.

The concept of Sanskritisation which is basically a process of social mobility was developed by M N Srinivas to describe the dynamic nature of the caste system. In his path-breaking study, Religion and society among the Coorgs (1952), M N Srinivas explained caste mobility in terms of cultural emulation of the

Brahmins or other demin cut castes by the local lower castes. He defined Sanskritisation as “a process by which a “low” Hindu caste, or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently "twice-born" caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community.” William Rowes’ study of the Noniya in Senapur village in eastern Uttar Pradesh shows the success of a middle level caste in acquiring upward mobility through Sanskritisation after achieving economic prosperity. A clear example of Sanskritisation is the emulation of the practice of "twice-born castes" such as, vegetarianism by those so-called "lower castes". This paved way for mobility to occur within caste system. However, lower castes aspiring to climb upwards in caste hierarchy have to face hostility from the higher castes.

Along with Sanskritisation, the process of Westernisation has also made social mobility possible. Westernisation refers to all cultural changes and institutional innovations in India as it came into political and cultural contract with the western nations especially British. It includes establishment of scientific, technological and educational institutions, rise of nationalism, new political culture and leadership in the country. Many higher castes gave up traditional customs and adopted the life style of the westerners.

The process of industrialisation and urbanisation (migration of people from villages to cities) affected caste structure to a great extent. Industrial growth provided new sources of livelihood to people and made occupational mobility possible. With new transportation facilities, there was frequent communication. People of all castes travelled together and there was no way to follow the prevalent ideology of ritual purity and pollution between castes. Taboos against food sharing started weakening when industrial workers from different castes lived and worked together.

Urbanisation and growth of cities also changed the functioning of the caste system. Kingsley Davis (1951) held that the anonymity, congestion, mobility, secularism and changeability of the city makes the operation of the caste virtually impossible. Ghurye (1961) holds that changes in the rigidities of the caste system were due to the growth of city life. M N Srinivas (1962) holds that due to the migration of Brahmins to the towns, the non-Brahmins refused to show same respect to them which they showed before, and inter-caste eating and drinking taboos were also weakened. Quite significantly, the superiority of the Brahmins has been challenged, once considered a religious dogma and was based on birth, is no more so, as it was in the past.

Besides industrialisation and urbanisation, other factors which emerged after Independence in the country significantly affected the caste system. Various political and economic policies and reforms were initiated after Independence in the country which led to several changes after Independence. The socio-religious reforms and movements, merger of some states spread of modern education, growth of modern profession, spatial mobility and the, spread of market economy accelerated the process of modernisation and development. Consequently, changes and the process of social mobility in the caste system gained momentum.

There were occupational opportunities which were ritually neutral. Entry into these new occupations were based on the technical skills imparted through modern education. When people from different castes came together in modern occupational settings and had close interaction, it gave a serious blow to the ritual, heredity and hierarchical structure and aspects of caste.

Under the caste system, endogamy was the basis of mate-selection. The members of a caste or sub-caste were forbidden by non changing social laws to marry outside the group. But at present the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 have removed restrictions of endogamy and declared inter-caste marriages as legally valid. Of late, several factors such as impact of western philosophy, co-education, working together of males and females of different castes in the same factory or office have contributed to an increase in the cases of inter-caste marriages, love-marriages and late-marriages and live-in-relationship.

Ram Krishna Mukherjee (1958) stated that both the economic aspect (change in occupational specialisation) and the social aspect (adoption of higher caste customs, giving up polluting professions, etc.) of the caste system, have vastly changed the caste system. He said that change is more specific in urban areas where rules on social interaction and, caste commensalities have relaxed and civil and religious disabilities of lower castes have been lifted. There are scholars of the viewpoint that changes are taking place gradually within the caste system but they are not disintegrative of the system as a whole. Ghurye (1961) was of the opinion that caste has shed some of its features. He said, that "caste no longer rigidly determines an individual's occupation but continues to prescribe its norms about marriage within the caste. One still has to depend very largely on one's caste for help at critical periods of one's life, like marriage, birth and death." He believed that strength of the caste system in social life is as strong today as it was earlier. Although Andre Beteille has referred to the changes taking place in the caste system in terms of its structural distance between castes, style of life, commensality and endogamy. Scholars have also said that caste has lost its traditional elements of purity and pollution and became more of an identity group. (Sharma, K)

4.4.1 Caste and Politics

The phenomenon of dominance of one caste over the other was an important factor in the maintenance of the caste system. Traditionally, economic and political dominance coincided with the ritual dominance. According to Srinivas (1966) a caste is said to be dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area and it economically and politically exercises a great influence. Such factors combine to place a particular caste group in a position of political dominance.

Sociologists have undertaken political analysis in terms of caste and traced the political development of caste through time. They have analysed the role of caste and its linkage to politics to gain political power. The system of parliamentary democracy, adult franchise, democratic decentralisation and the system of Panchayati Raj have taken politics down to the grassroots level where caste becomes a prominent variable in electoral politics. The demands of organised party system in politics have brought about a coalition of castes. The caste-based politics has promoted caste and importance of caste in politics. The caste has been the mobilizing, as well as, the unifying factor for political gains, material welfare, social status and caste alliances. (See Kothari, R. (ed.) 1970: *Caste in Indian Politics,* Orient Langman, New Delhi)

The modern political system is universal by the Constitution and it does not take into account the caste factor in privilege but in practice, on the ground level, caste considerations have come to occupy a predominant position in the democratic political process. The Political consciousness on caste lines is evident in references made to caste sabhas or caste associations and their role in Indian politics and political mobilisation.

Rajni Kothari has examined the relationship between caste and politics. He found the factors of education, government patronage and expanding franchise have penetrated the caste system, affecting the democratic politics in the country. The Economic opportunity, administrative patronage rising consciousness, is changing social attitudes Recognition of new opportunities and the rising consciousness and aspirations have drawn caste into politics and political mobilisation.

The different parties and movements mobilise caste based status groups as resources for their political interest. Very often candidates are fielded by political parties on the basis of their caste identity. The caste provides a readymade system of mobilization and support for the organised party politics. There are various caste federations which provide an organised political platform to fight for their common course. For example, the Kshatriya Sabha of Gujarat is an illustration of an active caste federation. It consists of clusters of castes or Jatis, that functions like a caste-based political community. Thus, caste is a factor of political significance and it is closely interlinked with politics.

4.4.2 Measures to Prohibit Caste Discrimination

After Independence the spread of education and social reform movements played a significant role in emancipation of socially and economically backward castes and classes. It is through them and various other legal constitutional measures the discrimination based on caste and other factors was prohibited. Our Constitution is based on democratic values of equality, liberty and fraternity. It does not allow any discrimination. In order to fulfil the Constitutional mandate, several Acts were passed in the Parliament to end the exploitative and discriminatory practices against lower castes. The government of India has enacted laws to remove untouchability. It has also brought in many reforms to improve the quality of life of the weaker sections of society. Some of them are:

i) the Constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights;

ii) the Abolition of ' untouchability' in 1950;

iii) the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and

iv) the Provision of reservation in educational institutions, employment and other opportunities;

v) the establishment of the department of Social Welfare and National Commissions for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, renamed as Protection of Civil Rights Act, in 1976.

The SC & ST Act, 1989 is one of the important measures to check, deter and prevent activities against them. There is also an Act, 2013 for the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation. This Act aims to prohibit the employment of manual scavenging, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment, and the construction of unhygienic latrines. The Act seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and seeks to provide alternative employment to them.

Activity 2

Discuss with your friends about the legal measures and different steps that our Constitution provides to stop caste discrimination in Indian society. Write a report of a page on this discussion and discuss it with your peer group at your study center.

The Constitution of India provides measures for protective discrimination under various articles to facilitate the process of creating an equalitarian society. The Constitution gives preferential treatment to Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes. Thus reservation was a strategy to give them a share in power, politics, services, employment and in order to uplift them socially and economically. In 1950, the Constitution provided 12.5% reservation for SCs and 5% for STs but later in 1970, it was raised to 15% for SCs and 7.5% for STs. The reservation was provided in jobs, admission to educational institutions and central and state legislative assemblies. Accordingly, all state governments enacted laws to provide reservation for the SCs and STs in services and other areas in the state. There is special provision for Other Backward Classes OBCs) made in the Constitution of India wherein the term OBC is used for them. Article 15(4) of the Constitution refers to them as 'socially and educationally backward classes of citizens'. Article 340, refers to them as 'socially and educationally backward classes'. Article 16(4) refers to them only as 'backward class of citizens'. Article 46 refers to them as educationally and economically weaker sections of the people'. These are several provisions laid down in different Articles in our Constitution for the advancement of Other Backward Classes or OBCs.

However, the issue of reservation is more complex, particularly at the all India level. The ground reality has shown many of the measures are not effective in improving the condition of the poor and deprived. The issue of criteria of reservation is, therefore, raised again, and again. There is the need for its assessment and policy formulation from time to time.

In the final analysis we observe that caste is losing the traditional functions, norms and structure because of the changes that have taken place in society but caste still exists. It is acquiring new 'avatar to suit the changed environment, condition and mind-sets.

The caste is modifying itself but is still persisting, particularly in the rural areas. In urban areas, caste is persisting in the form of complex networks of interest and class groups. However caste as a dynamic reality of Indian society has undergone many changes and yet there are elements of continuity. The caste system as an identity group exists as a unique social institution of Indian society.

Check Your Progress II

i) Discuss briefly how caste system has changed in contemporary India. Use about 10 lines to answer the question.

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ii) How does Indian Constitution helps protect the lower castes from discrimination? Use about 10 lines to answer this question.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have explained briefly the characteristics of caste and its history. It is associated with hierarchy and existed in rural areas in the form of Jajmani system. In addition to hierarchy, caste system is characterised by segmental division of labour i.e. occupation, restrictions on commensality which is eating 'kachcha' or 'pucca' food together and social interaction, civil and religious disabilities, privileges of different sections, restrictions on marriage and the choice of occupations. The changes and the continuity within the caste system have been explained. The relationship of caste and politics has also been explained with special reference to the role of caste in the institution of Panchayati Raj. In the last part, measures to prohibit caste discrimination taken by the government during the framing of our Constitution are explained. In conclusion, the present status of the system of caste, changes and continuity within the system have been explained.

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IGNOU BDP material (2017 (Reprint) ESO-12, Block 5 Caste and Class & ESO-14, Society and Stratification; Block 5 Explaining Caste in Indian Society.

4.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) Caste divides Hindu Society into different segments based on their regional caste hierarchy of Jatis and subjatis within the all India dursian of Varma (or colour). This hierarchy is ascriptive in nature i.e. one is learn into that Varna or Caste and is based on ritual purity and pollution.

ii) The attributional approach to understand caste system is based on the understanding of caste is terms of various attributes; such as hierarchy, purity and pollution occupations, etc. This approach has been used by sociologists like G.S. Ghurye.

Check Your Progress II

i) Caste system is considered to be a closed system of stratification; unlike class. However, sociologists have found in their studies that social mobility in terms of movement of caste groups from lower to upper rank had always been there. But; after Independence the process of Sanskritisation, Westernisation and Modernisation along with the changes brought about by a universal political system of democracy encoded in our Constitution helped bring faster changes in society. This led to changes in caste system but yet some rigid elements, such as, identity and its links to politics still continue to shape society in India.

ii) Indian Constitution through its mandate of bringing about equality, liberty and fraternity for all citizens of India protects its citizens from being discriminated through certain Constitutional measures such as:

i) Abolition of underchaibility

ii) Constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights.

iii) Reservation of seats for SC, ST and OBCs as measures of productive discrimination to ameliorete their social and economic condition and bring about social justice and equality in society.

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UNIT 5 CLASS*

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept of social class in India;
- discuss the impact of British rule on the class formation in India;
- explain the consequent uneven growth of social classes; and
- describe the rural and urban classes in India.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

You have studied the caste dimension of social structure in the previous units. You learnt how well rooted and significant caste is in our society. Here, we will introduce you to another dimension of Indian social structure, namely, its class component. We will discuss the classes in India in the British and post-British periods. We will also describe these classes in the context of rural and urban society in India.

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* Adopted from IGNOU, BDP, ESO-12, Unit 23 pp.55 by Archana Singh

5.2 SOCIAL CLASSES IN INDIA

Social class has been defined as a kind of social group, which is neither legally defined nor religiously sanctioned. It is generally defined as a stratum of people occupying similar social positions. Wealth, income, education, occupation are some of the basic determinants of class. It is relatively open, i.e. any one who satisfies the basic criteria can become its member. There are several classes in a society. These classes are hierarchically ranked primarily in terms of wealth and income. The differences of wealth and income are expressed in different life styles and consumption patterns. Social classes are the characteristic features of industrial societies (Bottomore 1962: 188). To give you an example, in a capitalist society we generally find the class of capitalists and the **working classes** besides several others.

Social classes in India, as we see them today, had their genesis during the British rule. This is not to say that the class phenomenon was absent in the pre-British Indian society. The class dimension of Indian society was only less pronounced than it turned out to be during the British period. The so-called self-sufficiency of the village community appears to have been one of the reasons behind it. That is, village community generally produced only what was required for the consumption needs of the village. There was hence little surplus and therefore less marked differentiation among the village population.

Even when there was a marked class dimension; it was overshadowed by the caste component. In fact, the only sphere where class dimension showed itself rather more sharply was in the nature of interaction between the rulers and the ruled. The king and his courtiers represented a class quite different from the subjects over whom they ruled. The courtiers comprised the *Zamindars, Jagirdars* and several others. They along with the king lived on the revenue collected from the village community under their jurisdiction.

Besides these classes there were also classes of administrative officers of various ranks, of merchants, artisans and specialists of various kinds.

The colonial rule in India proved to be one of the turning points in Indian history. It introduced new elements, which led to some radical changes in Indian society. Now let us see what the impact of the British rule was on the class formation in India.

5.3 THE IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON CLASS FORMATION IN INDIA

The impact of British rule in India has brought about far-reaching changes in Indian society. Some of these changes are discussed in the following sections.

5.3.1 Change in Agriculture

The emergence of new social classes in India was the consequence of far-reaching changes brought about by the British in the economic structure of India. The British administration revolutionised the existing land system. It did away with the traditional rights of the village community over the village land. Instead it created individual ownership rights in land by introducing several land reforms during the eighteenth century, such as the Permanent Settlement, the *Ryotwari* settlement, and the *Mahalwari* settlement. With this, land became private property, a commodity in the market. It could be mortgaged, purchased or sold.

Till the village ownership of land existed, the village was the unit of assessment. The new land revenue system eliminated the village as the unit. It introduced the system of individual land assessment and revenue payment. Along with it, a new method of fixing land revenue and its payment was introduced. Previously, revenue was fixed at a specified portion of the year's actual produce. This was replaced by a system of fixed money payment irrespective of crops. The landlord or cultivator under the system was hence forced to meet this demand. Further, the payment of revenue in cash gave impetus to production of cash crops in place of food crops. With expanding railway and transport system production for market became fairly well established. This commercialisation of agriculture, in turn, stimulated the growth of trade and commerce in India.

5.3.2 Trade and Commerce

Trade and commerce were centred around two things. Supply of raw material for industries in Britain was one. Procuring of the British manufactured goods for consumption in India was another. The latter had a disastrous effect on town and village handicrafts. Village and town handicrafts could not stand the competition brought about by import of goods from Britain and got disintegrated. Meanwhile there was lack of sufficient industrial development. The result was that the emerging industry could not absorb the displaced population, which eventually fell on an already stagnant agriculture.

5.3.3 Development of Railways and Industry

Alongside the growth of trade and commerce, there was rapid development of the transport system in India. The railways expanded on an increasing scale from the middle of the nineteenth century. These developments were undertaken with a view to meet the raw material requirements of industries in Britain. The construction of railways and roads also gave scope for investment of British capital in India. It led to better mobility of troops and for establishment of law and order. Investment of British capital found an outlet initially in such spheres as plantations (indigo, tea), cotton, jute and mining industries. This was the beginning of the industrialisation process in India. By then, there was accumulation of sufficient savings on the part of Indian traders and merchants. This served as capital and made possible the creation of Indian owned industries.

5.3.4 State and Administrative System

Even before these developments, the British government had organised a huge and extensive state machinery to administer the conquered territory. A large number of educated individuals were required to staff this machinery. It was not possible to secure the staff of educated people from Britain for running such huge administrative machinery. Therefore the foreign rulers felt that there was a need for the introduction of Western education in India. Thus, schools, colleges and universities were established to impart Western education in India and to cater to the needs of the expanding economy and growing state machinery. As a consequence of the impact of British rule in India, the Indian society experienced an uneven growth of social classes. We are going to examine some aspects of this uneven growth in the next section.

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Activity 1

Find out at least five people of your father, grand father or great-grand father's generation and request them to tell you about the changes that they had observed in the area where they lived due to the impact of British rule in India.Write a note of two pages and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

5.4 UNEVEN GROWTH OF SOCIAL CLASSES

The process of the rise of new social classes was an uneven one. It did not develop uniformly in different parts of the country and also among various communities. This was due to the fact that the social forces, which developed during the British rule, spread both in time and tempo unevenly. This was, in turn, dependent on the growth of political power in India. For example, it was in Bengal that two of the social classes – ***zamindars*** and **tenants** – came into existence first. Again it was in Bengal and Bombay that the first industrial enterprises started. This lead to the emergence of the class of industrialists and workers in this region. It was for this reason that the British established a complex administrative system and introduced modern education first in Bengal and Bombay.

The process of the rise of new social classes among different communities was also uneven. This was due to the fact that certain communities were already engaged in definite economic, social or educational vocations in pre-British period. For example Baniyas were traders by vocation in our traditional social structure. Hence they were the first to take up modern commerce, banking and industrial enterprises (Misra 1978: 14). Similarly, Brahmans were the first to take up modern education and enter the **professional classes**. These communities took up the new challenges and entered these spheres of activity first because they were already having the basic disposition towards these occupations. Thus on the eve of Independence we find that Indian social structure was made up of innumerable castes and classes. In some cases, these coincided with each other but in some they did not.

Check Your Progress I

i) Define the concept of social classes. Use about seven lines.

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ii) List some of the changes that have lead to the emergence of social classes in India. Use about three lines.

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iii) Spell out two spehers which show uneven growth of social class. Use about two lines.

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5.5 SOCIAL CLASSES IN RURAL INDIA

In rural areas, classes consist principally of: i) **landlords**, ii) **tenants**, iii) **peasant proprietors**, iv) **agricultural labourers** and v) **artisans**. Now let us examine each of them one by one.

5.5.1 Landlords

The British administration made various types of land settlements such as, the Permanent settlement, *Ryotwari* settlement and *Mahalwari* settlement with the natives. Under the Permanent Settlement a new type of landlord was created out of the erstwhile tax collectors viz., the *zamindars*. Under the term of this settlement, the right of ownership was conferred on the *zamindars*. Before this settlement, the land used to be auctioned by the state on *patta* basis on which the *zamindars* only had the right to collect revenue. After this settlement, this land became theirs permanently i.e., they became hereditary owners of this land. *Zamindar's* only obligation was the payment of fixed land revenue to the British Government.

The new type of landholders were for all practical purposes equivalent to those of the landlords. As a result of this arrangement the peasants of this land were transformed into a mass of tenants in a day. This settlement was introduced by Lord Cornwalis in 1793, in the vast region of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and in certain districts of Madras. It was later also introduced in U.P. and parts of Bombay, Punjab, Sind, and so on. The *zamindari* settlement gave rise to a class of landlords, which was hitherto unknown in Indian society. The conferment of the right of ownership gave recognition to the right of mortgage and sale. Failure on the part of some *zamindars* to pay the fixed revenue led to the auction of portions of large estates. This in turn, led to the entry of a new class of landlords who were primarily the merchants and money-lenders.

The right of ownership also recognised the right to lease. This led to large-scale growth of smaller tenures. Legislation made such tenures transferable. In the course of time, tenure passed into the hands of non-cultivators such as money-lenders, traders, and absentee landlords, who had very little interest in agriculture itself. Their main aim was only in extracting money from the land. The passing of land into the hands of non-cultivating classes was not the feature of *zamindari* areas alone. Similar development took place in the *ryotwari* areas too where the right of ownership was vested in the actual cultivators.

Types of Landlords

Broadly, there were two types of landlords: (i) the *zamindars/taluqdars* (old landlords) and (ii) money-lenders, merchants and others. Those who held such ownership of tenure rights (in *zamindari* areas) were often referred to as

intermediaries. These intermediaries were of various categories known by different names and found in various regions of U.P., Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. *Taluqdars* were inferior intermediaries whom the large *zamindars* created out of their own *zamindari* rights. *Jotedars* found in some parts of Bengal were substantial landholders who held land direct from the *zamindars.* They got land cultivated by subletting to the tenants on a 50: 50 share. Similarly, *Pattidars* held permanent leases at fixed dues under the *zamindars.* Ijardars on the other hand were those to whom the revenue of an area was hired out on a contract basis.

Land Reform and its Consequences

On the eve of Independence, the class of intermediaries owned a large portion of land in their hands while the peasant cultivators had little or no lands. There was also extreme economic inequality leading to socio-political inequality in Indian society. Hence, our national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Patel placed a lot of emphasis on land reforms after India gained independence. The first phase of land reform was aimed at abolition of intermediaries such as, the *Zamindars.* The *Zamindari* system was abolished in the 1950s and land reform was first implemented in Uttar Pradesh. The objective was to bring cultivators into direct relationship with the state. Hence, conferment of proprietary or occupancy rights on actual cultivator-tenants was a part of this measure.

The abolition of *Zamindari* system in the 1950s had several consequences. It led to the formation of new classes. For instance, the intermediaries like the *zamindars* declared themselves as the owners of the land. Previously the *zamindar* used to lease out their lands to the tenants. But when *Zamindari* system was abolished, in states like U.P., the Government permitted the erstwhile *zamindars* to declare ownership of those lands which they were cultivating themselves. These lands were called *'Khudkasht'* lands. So, as consequence, the *Zamindars* forced most of the tenants out of these lands and declared the land, which they were holding as *'Khudkasht'*. Thus, after the land reforms they simply came to be renamed as *bhoomidars,* i.e., cultivators of the soil. The tenants who were actually cultivating the land prior to the land reforms were thrown out of their lands and most of them became landless **agricultural labourers**. It led to the pauperisation of the peasants. But there was a category of better off tenants who were able to buy the surplus land, created due to the land ceilings from the *Zamindars*, at reasonably low rates determined by the Government. Thus, a new class of peasant proprietors or cultivators was formed who took up agriculture as an enterprise (Khusro 1975: 186).

Thus, the land reform measures after Independence failed to create a socially homogeneous class of cultivators. All the same, the top strata of the agrarian hierarchy, the *Zamindars,* lost their right to extract taxes from the peasants. They were left with truncated landholding. Their economic, political and social supremacy was also broken. Hence, they could no longer enjoy the kind of control they used to exercise over peasants. Under the circumstance, they found it difficult to live as rentiers. Indeed only a small proportion of them continue to live as rentiers. The rest have taken to active participation in the management and improvement of their farm.

They have also brought about radical change in the methods of agricultural production. The erstwhile landlords and some of the ex-tenants thus became the forerunners of capitalist trend in the Indian agriculture. In view of such changes,

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they also took maximum benefits out of the **Green Revolution** programme launched by the government. These changes had led to the development of a class of "gentlemen" or progressive farmers who had some education and often training in agriculture. These farmers had taken up agriculture as a kind of business. They invest money in agricultural crops, which have higher cash value i.e., they go in for cash crops. They read the reports of experts, use best seeds and fertilisers.

5.5.2 Peasant Proprietors

Another settlement made by the British is known by the name of Ryotwari Settlement. This was introduced in Madras, Bombay Presidencies in the nineteenth century. Under this settlement, ownership of land was vested in the peasants. The actual cultivators were subjected to the payment of revenue. However, this settlement was not a permanent settlement and was revised periodically after 20-30 years. It did not bring into existence a system of peasant ownership. Instead the cultivators came into direct contact with the State which replaced the oppressive role of the landlord. The settlement thus gave rise to a class of peasant proprietors. Owing to excessive land revenue, small landholdings, acute indebtedness, this class underwent impoverishment from the very beginning.

The process of differentiation was at work among the peasant proprietors. In the process, a few climbed up in the socio-economic hierarchy but a large number fell from their previous rank and position. A great majority of them were transformed into tenants and even agricultural labourers. This showed a large-scale passing of land from the actual cultivators to not only those of money-lenders, merchants and others, but also to a certain section of peasant proprietors who had become rich peasants.

In the post-Independence period, there was increase in the number of peasant proprietors as mentioned before in this unit. This was due to measures like *Zamindari* abolition and ceiling on existing landholdings and family labour. By paying compensation to *zamindars,* the erstwhile tenants obtained proprietary rights over the land, which they held as tenants. This option could be availed of by and large only by the rich tenants. Similarly, through ceiling on landholding, many could acquire proprietary rights in land.

The peasant proprietors, in the past as well as in the present, hardly constitute a homogeneous category. They may be broadly divided into three categories, namely, (i) the rich, (ii) the middle, and (iii) the poor peasants.

i) **Rich peasants:** They are proprietors with considerable holdings. They perform no fieldwork but supervise cultivation and take personal interest in land management and improvement. They are emerging into a strong capitalist farmer group.

ii) **Middle peasants:** They are landowners of medium size holdings. They are generally self-sufficient. They cultivate land with family labour.

iii) **Poor peasants:** They are landowners with holdings that are not sufficient to maintain a family. They are forced to rent in other's land or supplement income by working as labourers. They constitute a large segment of the agricultural population.

The peasant proprietors had been instrumental in bringing about great change in Indian agriculture, specially in Punjab, Haryana, western U.P., Karnataka and Bihar. This change is known as the Green Revolution. The role of such peasants was crucial in this change.

Green Revolution: After Independence, India was faced with acute food shortage. Green revolution was seen as a way out of the problem. Like all other programmes of planned rural development, India embarked upon the Green Revolution in the 1960s. It began launching programmes like the High Yielding Variety Programme (HYVP), the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP) and the like. These measures were introduced initially in a few selected areas, which were mostly irrigated. Under the programme, there was considerable use of fertilizers and pesticides. There was also increase in the acreage under irrigation either through canals or installation of water pumps, etc. Correspondingly, there was marked increase in crop yield. The programme, initiated initially on an experimental basis, took off exceedingly well in Punjab, Haryana and western U.P. The improved method of cultivation thus became a general pattern of agricultural practices in these parts of the country. There was even further trend towards modern method of cultivation viz. mechanisation. The increasing use of tractors, tillers, threshers, reflected this trend.

Such development led to grave social consequences. Socio economic inequalities inherent in the agrarian structure were further reinforced. It led to further concentration of land into the hands of a few. Side by side, rural poverty had increased. The agricultural labourers, the landless and near landless, form the core of the rural poor.

The present big landowners in various parts of India are formed into organisations to safeguard their interests. Some of these organisations are for example, All India Kisan Sabha, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Kshetkari Sanghatana and so on. Such organisations in some parts of India had begun in the British period. For example, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa Zamindars Association. Under the auspices of such organisations, peasants took part in the National Movement in India (Chandra 1971: 204). All categories of peasants are, in general, members of these organisations. They are, however, mostly dominated by rich peasants and leadership comes from them.

5.5.3 Tenants

The creation of *zamindari* settlement transformed the owner cultivators of pre-British India into a class of tenants. The *zamindars* resorted to the practice of extracting an exorbitant rent from the tenants. Those who failed to pay were evicted from land and were replaced by those ready to pay higher rents. Similar practice prevailed in estates, which were leased out by the *zamindars.* Broadly then there were two categories of tenants in *zamindari* areas – tenants under *zamindars* and tenants under lease (tenure) holders during the British period. Tenants under tenure holders were thus sub-tenants. Of course, various categories of tenants under subtenants too had grown up in Bengal. The lowest in the hierarchy were **sharecroppers**. This process of creating tenants and subtenants is called sub-infeudation.

The growth of tenants was not confined to *zamindari* areas alone. Even in *ryotwari* areas where peasant proprietorship was introduced, a new class of tenants grew.

They were composed broadly of the earlier owners whose land passed into the hands of money-lenders and others in the course of time. Legislations were passed from time to time in various parts to protect the interests of tenants. This did give some protection to the affluent category of tenants. The lower impoverished category of tenants remained unprotected.

On the eve of Independence, there were various categories of tenants. Broadly they could be classified as tenants, subtenants, sharecroppers, etc. In *zamindari* areas, of course, there were many sub-categories between the *zamindars* and the actual cultivators who were in general sharecroppers. Tenants on the whole enjoyed occupancy right. They could not be evicted. Sub-tenants in general enjoyed some security of tenure but were liable to eviction. Sharecroppers on the other hand did not have any security of tenure and were at the mercy of their landlords. They cultivated the land and retained only a half share of the produce.

Tenancy Reforms

Tenancy reforms became an important component of land reform programme. The provisions under the reforms were regulation of rent, security of tenure and ownership of tenant. However, there was not much success due to loopholes in the programme and its implementation. The benefits of the reform, of course, mainly went to the affluent section of the tenant class. They acquired ownership rights in areas not taken by the *zamindars* for their personal cultivation i.e., the land besides their *khudkasht* land. Subtenants too benefited to some extent as they could get the occupancy right and in some situations could even convert it into ownership right.

In short, the affluent section of tenants and subtenants were transformed into peasant proprietors with tenancy reform programme. Sharecroppers on the other hand, gained little from these programmes. With the second phase of land reform viz. ceiling on land holding, there was reduction in the extent of tenancy. Sharecropping however, continues even thereafter. Indeed, sharecroppers constitute the most important, if not the only, segment of tenant class in rural India today. Organisationally and politically, they are weak though they form a very important component of peasant organisation in India.

5.5.4 Agricultural Labourers

Non-cultivating landlords, peasant proprietors and tenants are not the only social groups connected with agriculture. Along with the swelling of rent paying tenants there was also a progressive rise in the number of agricultural labourers. The growing indebtedness among peasant population, followed by land alienation and displacement of village artisans was largely responsible for this.

The agricultural labourers were and still are broadly of three types. Some owned or held a small plot of land in addition to drawing their livelihood from sale of their labour. Others were landless and lived exclusively on hiring out of their labour. In return for their labour, the agricultural labourers were paid wages, which were very low. Their condition of living was far from satisfactory. Wages were generally paid in kind i.e. food grains like paddy, wheat and pulses. Sometimes cash was paid in lieu of wages in kind. A certain standard measure was employed to give these wages. In fact, payment in kind continued alongside money payments. There was another type of labour prevailing in many parts of the country. Their status was almost that of bondage or semi bondage. Dublas and Halis in Gujarat, Padials in Tamil Nadu are a few examples of such bonded labour existing in India. Such labour force exists in some parts even today. The land reform programmes after Independence have done almost nothing to improve the condition of agricultural labourers in India. Of course, the government has proposed to settle them on co-operative basis on surplus or newly reclaimed or wasteland. Bonded labour was legally abolished in India in 1972 and Government, as well as, voluntary agencies are doing serious work in order to locate the bonded labourers and rehabilitate them. There has been considerable swelling in the number of agricultural labourers in the wake of the land reform programmes. Resumption of land by landlords for personal cultivation and eviction of tenants from their tenure have been the factors leading to this trend. The process was further accelerated by the Green Revolution. Large farms, being in conformity with the Green Revolution, has opened the way for greater concentration of land by purchase, sale or through eviction of tenants. In the process the rank of agricultural labourers has further increased. At the same time, there is very low rate of transfer of the agricultural labour population to industry. Hence, there is little likelihood of radical change in the social and economic situation of the agricultural labourers in most parts of the country. The government has, of course, taken some steps towards protecting their interest. Legislation towards abolition of bonded labour and minimum wage structure on the one hand, and employment generating programmes on the other, reflect this concern. Such measures are, however, far from effective. The agricultural labourers hence constitute the weakest section of the rural society.

5.5.5 Artisans

In rural areas the class of artisans form an integral part of the village community. They have existed since the ancient periods contributing to the general self-sufficient image of an Indian village. Some of these are like the carpenter (*Badhai*), the ironsmith (*Lohar*), the potter (*Kumhar*) and so on. Not all villages had families of these artisans but under the *Jajmani* system, sometimes a family of these occupational castes served more than one village.

Some social mobility did exist in the pre-British period but, generally, these artisan castes did not experience much change. Due to the advent of the British in India, this relatively static existence of the artisan castes suffered a radical change. Indian economy became subordinate to the interests of the British trade and industry.

Rural artisans and craftsmen were hard hit under the British rule. They could not compete with the mass manufactured goods produced by the British industries. These goods were machine-made and cheap. For example, textile used to be an area where Indian artisans excelled themselves. Even today we hear the praises of *"Dhaka malmal"* (a fine variety of cloth produced in Dhaka, now in Bangladesh). Due to the British impact and availability of mass manufactured cloth, the Indian textiles suffered a severe set-back. Therefore, the demand for the goods produced by the Indian artisans dropped. The artisans suffered badly and most of them became so pauperised that they had to revert back to agriculture. This in turn flooded the agricultural fields with surplus labour which became counter productive instead of useful.

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The destruction of the village arts and crafts led to deindustrialisation of rural economy. After Independence, the Indian Government has taken several steps to improve the condition of the artisans. New cottage industries have been established, loan facilities provided and their skills have been recognised in the form of National Awards etc. Transport facilities to bring their products to the urban markets have also been provided. However, the class of artisans and craftsmen in the rural areas is not a homogeneous lot. In their own group there are some who are highly skilled and some semi-skilled or less skilled. Thus, socially all of them cannot be ranked in one class. But in a broad sense we can consider them as a class by virtue of their occupation. Yet, they remain very muchunorganised except to some extent in parts of south India. Their chance of developing an effective organisation for collective bargain too appears quite remote. The distinct social classes commonly seen in rural and urban India are picturised in figure numbers 5.1 and 5.2, respectively.

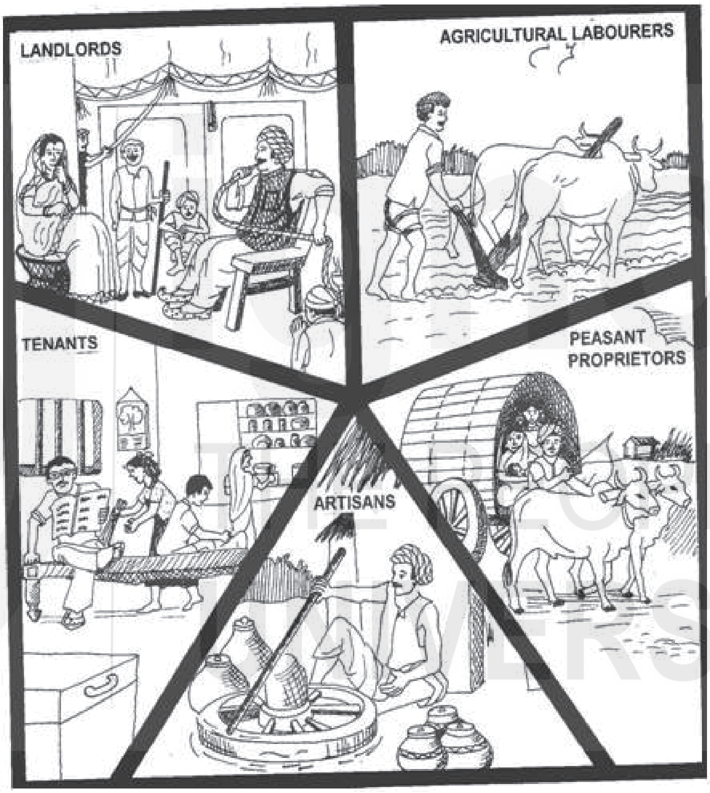

Figure 5.1: Social Classes in rural India

Check Your Progress II

i) Describe the ryotwari settlement of land during the British rule. Use two lines for your answer.

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ii) Describe the permanent settlement of land during the British rule. Use three lines for your answer.

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iii) Distinguish between the rich peasant proprietors and the middle peasant proprietors, in about six lines.

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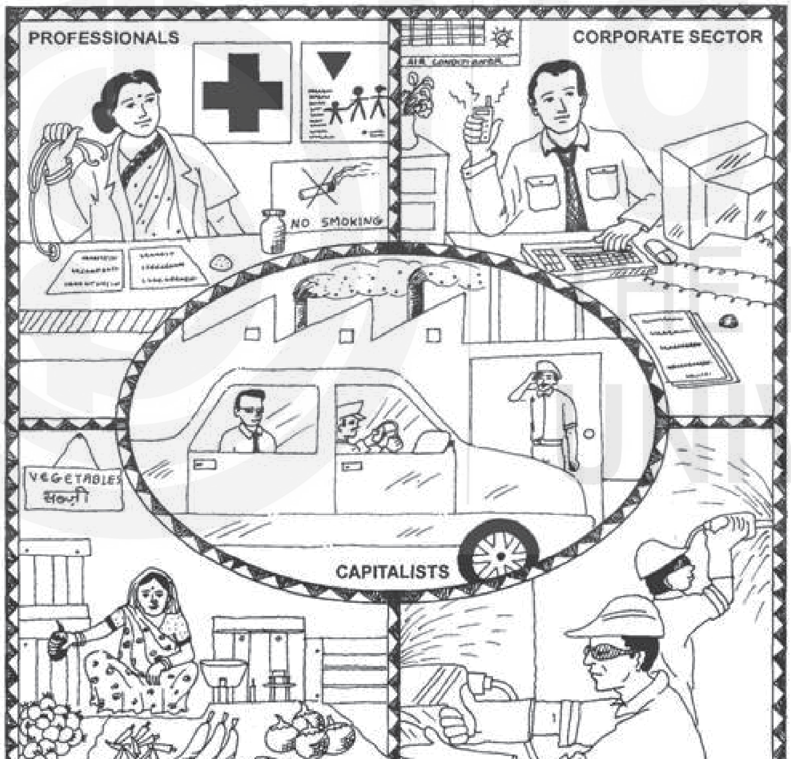
PROFESSIONALS
CORPORATE SECTOR
AIR CONDITIONER
NO SMOKING
VEGETABLES
सब्जी
CAPITALISTS
PETTY TRADERS AND SHOPKEEPERS
WORKING CLASSES

Figure 5.2 : Social Classes in urban India

5.6 SOCIAL CLASSES IN URBAN INDIA

In the urban areas social classes comprise principally (i) **capitalists** (commercial and industrial), (ii) **corporate sector;** (iii) **professional classes**, (iv) **petty traders and shopkeepers** and (v) **working classes** (see figure 5.2). Now let us examine each of them one by one.

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5.6.1 Commercial and Industrial Classes

Under the British rule, production in India became production for market. As a result of this, internal market expanded and the class of traders engaged in internal trading grew. Simultaneously, India was also linked up with the world market. This led to the growth of a class of merchants engaged in export-import business. Thus, there came into being a commercial middle class in the country. With the establishment of railways, the accumulation of savings on the part of this rich commercial middle class took the form of capital to be invested in other large-scale manufactured goods and modern industries. Like the British, who pioneered the industrial establishment in India, the Indians, too made investment initially in plantations, cotton, jute, mining and so on. Indian society thus included in its composition such new groups as mill owners, mine owners, etc. Subsequently, they also diversified the sphere of their industrial activity. Economically and socially this class turned out to be the strongest class in India.

However, Indians lagged far behind in comparison to the British in these activities. Government policy was mainly responsible for their slow development during the colonial period. The conflict of interest with the British led to the formation of independent organisations by the Indian **commercial and industrial classes**. This class participated in the freedom struggle by rallying behind the professional classes who were the backbone of the Indian National Movement. With the attainment of Independence, emphasis was laid on rapid industrialisation of the country. In this process, the state was to play a very active role. It evolved economic and industrial policies, which clearly indicated the role of the commercial and industrial class as the catalyst of industrialisation in India. It also actively assisted such classes towards augmentation of production. The state hence introduced the mixed economy pattern, which implies that there is a public sector and a private sector in the Indian Economy. The major fields like agriculture, industry and trade were left to the private individuals. The creation of infrastructure and establishment of heavy and strategic industries was taken up by the state sector. This type of economy led to a phenomenal rise in the number of industries owned and controlled by the capitalists. It also led to the rise of commercial classes. The commercial and business class has therefore, grown in scale and size in the post-Independence era. These industries were not confined to traditional sectors alone such as textile, jute, mines, and plantation. Rather there was considerable diversification into steel industries, paper mills, and various steel manufactured goods. Industrialisation, as has been going on, however shows a disturbing trend. There is a growing tendency towards inequality amongst industrial classes. There is heavy concentration of assets, resources and income in a few business houses such as the Tatas, Birlas, Dalmias, and a few others.

5.6.2 The Corporate Sector

Any organisation that is under government ownership and control is called as public sector units and any organisation, which does not belong to public sector can be taken to be a part of private sector. The firms and organisation which are owned, controlled and managed exclusively by private individuals and entities are included in private sector. All private sector firms can be classified into two categories, such as individually owned and collectively owned. Collectively owned firms are further classified into: i) partnership firms; ii) joint Hindu family iii) joint-stock companies and iv) co-operatives. The most important of these is the joint-stock organisation, which is otherwise popularly known as corporate sector. Joint-stock companies which do no belong to public sector are collectively known as private corporate sector. Indian corporate sector is substantially large and highly diversified. The role and significance of private corporate sector can be gauged from the contribution it makes in terms of value added to national economy. The contribution of private corporate sector in terms of net value added, increased from 10 per cent of the total 'net value added' generated in the economy in early 1980s to around 19 per sent of the same in mid 1990s (Shanta 1999). This clearly shows the significance of private corporate sector in the economy is increasing constantly. The private corporate sector has been important in many other important respects also. According to a study carried out by 'Dalal Street Investment Journal (2000), most companies, which achieved best growth in 1999-2000 in terms of their net profit, belong to private corporate sector. Greater move towards privatisation after the adoption of new economic policy in 1991 accorded significant importance to private sector in the development process of the economy. Due to the radical change in policy approach from regularisation to liberalisation, private corporate sector has gained centre stage in the economic areas.

5.6.3 Professional Classes

The new economic and state systems brought about by the British rule required cadres of educated Indians trained in modern law, technology, medicine, economics, administrative science and other subjects. In fact, it was mainly because of the pressing need of the new commercial and industrial enterprises and the administrative systems that the British government was forced to introduce modern education in India. They established modern educational institutions on an increasing scale. Schools and colleges giving legal, commercial and general education were started to meet the needs of the state and the economy. Thus, there came into being an expanding professional class. Such social categories were linked up with modern industry, agriculture, commerce, finance, administration, press and other fields of social life. The professional classes comprise modern lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers and others working in the modern commercial and other enterprises, officials functioning in state administrative machinery, engineers, technologists; agriculture scientists, journalists and so on. The role of this class in the National Movement was decisive. They were, in fact, pioneers, and pace-setters. They were also the force behind progressive social and religious reform movements in the country.

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in post-independent India has opened the way for large-scale employment opportunities in industries, trade and commerce, construction, transport, services and other varied economic activities. Simultaneously, the state has created a massive institutional set-up comprising a complex bureaucratic structure throughout the length and breadth of the country. This has provided employment on a sizeable scale. The employment in these sectors, whether private or government requires prerequisite qualifications, such as education, training, skill, and so on. Bureaucrats, management executives, technocrats, doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, are some of the categories who possess such skills.

They have grown considerably in size and scale ever since independence. This class, however, hardly constitutes a homogeneous category. Of course, it enjoys pay and condition of work far more favourable than those engaged in manual work but less than those enjoyed by the upper class. However, even within this non-proprietary class of non-manual workers, a deep hierarchy exists. There are some high paid cadres at the top. A large proportion on the other hand, has earnings of only a little above those of the non-manual workers. There are also considerable differences in the condition of their work and opportunity for promotion. They differ in their styles of life as well. In view of these observations we can say that they are only gradually crystallising into a well-defined middle class.

5.6.4 Petty Traders, Shopkeepers and Unorganised Workers

In addition to the new classes discussed above, there has also been in existence in urban areas a class of petty traders and shopkeepers. These classes have developed with the growth of modem cities and towns. They constitute the link between the producers of goods and commodities and the mass of consumers. That is, they buy goods from the producers or wholesalers and sell it among the consumers. Thus, they make their living on the profit margin of the prices on which they buy and sell their goods and commodities.

Like all other classes, this class also has grown in scale in post-independent India. The unprecedented growth of cities in the process of urbanisation, which the post-independent India has been witness to, has stimulated the growth of this class. The pressure of population on land and lack of avenues of employment in rural society has led to a large-scale migration of rural population to towns and cities in search of employment. Such migration is taking place not only in big cities but also in hundreds of medium sized or small sized cities that are springing up in different parts of the country. Urbanisation on the other hand, offers a variety of new activities and employment. The growing urban population creates demands for various kinds of needs and services. Petty shop-keeping and trading caters to these needs of the urban population. A section of the urban population draws its livelihood from these sources. In view of the growing urbanisation their size has considerably increased. Besides these spheres of activities, urbanisation also offers opportunities for employment in the organised and unorganised sector of the economy. The opportunities in the organised sector are small and require educational qualification, and training. The bulk of rural migrants lack this pre-requisite and hence the organised sector is closed to them. Invariably then, they fall back upon the unorganised sector of the economy. They work in small-scale production units or crafts, industry or manual service occupation. They get low wages, and also are deprived of the benefits, the organised labour force are entitled to.

In the wake of economic liberalisation since 1991, there is now a trend towards deregulation of labour market, which may make the labour relations in the unorganised sector more exploitative. Although economic liberalisation is affecting the organised workers directly, there may be considerable impact on unorganised workers. For instance, the growing unemployment in the organised sector tends to decrease the wages and the working days of the workers in the unorganised sector. Besides many petty trade and business activities engaging unorganised workers will be affected because of the entry of the private corporate sector and multinational corporations. A recent study (Haque and Naidu 1999) shows that the impact of economic liberalisation has been disastrous for those employed in petty trade, artisans, fisherman, etc. thus illiteracy coupled with lack of organisational strength is likely to worsen the working environment and labour relations in the unorganised sector.

This class also constitutes an amorphous category. It comprises on the one hand self-employed petty shopkeepers traders, vendors, hawkers, and on the other, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the informal sector. They are the least organised of the urban groups in India.

Activity 2

In your neighbourhood select ten people of different occupational backgrounds and chart out the classes to which they belong, such as, landlord, tenants, artisans, agricultural labourers, capitalist, professional class, petty traders and shopkeepers or working class.

1) What are your reasons to put these people in these classes? Give at least two reasons for each.
2) Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with other students of your Study Centre.

5.6.5 Working Classes

Origin of the working class could be traced back to the British rule. This was the modern working class which was the direct result of modern industries, railways, and plantations established in India during the British period. This class grew in proportion as plantations, factories, mining, industry, transport, railways and other industrial sectors developed and expanded in India. The Indian working class was formed predominantly out of the pauperised peasants and ruined artisans. Level of living and working conditions characterised their existence. A large proportion of them generally remained indebted because of their inability to maintain themselves and their families. The government passed legislation, from time to time, such as the Indian Posts Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Factories Act, the Miners Act, etc. These were however, considered by social thinkers as inadequate to protect the rights of the labourers.

These hard conditions of life and labour led to the emergence of trade unions and the growth of working class movement in India. This was evident from the participation of the workers in, strikes and other activities launched by trade unions from time to time. As a result, there was considerable improvement in the wage structure and working conditions of the working class populations in India.

India has undergone rapid industrialisation after Independence. This industrialisation is no longer confined to a few urban centres as was the case in colonial period. Further, it is also no longer confined to a few traditional sectors such as textile, jute, mining and plantation. It has diversified into new spheres. The state itself has played a pivotal role in the expansion of heavy and strategic industries.

In view of this working class has grown in volume in post-independent India. They have also been dispersed to different parts and different sectors of the industry. Thus, the working class has become much more heterogeneous. It consists of workers employed in different types of industries that have different social and historical background. This diversity in the working class has given rise to a complex set of relations among the different sectors.

The attitude of the government towards the working class too underwent change in the post-independence period. The government's attitude towards working class had become more favourable. It had imposed some regulation on the employers and had granted some protection to the workers. Several Acts were passed granting some facilities to the workers. Some of these are Payment of Bonus Act, Provident Fund and Gratuity Act etc. All these affected the working class people in the country.

It is a changed scenario ever since India adopted New Economic Policy and Structural Adjustment programme in 1991. The New Economic Policy, which operates under an open and liberalised economic regime, has emphasised a deregulated regime with less emphasis on regulation of labour and employment conditions. This trend largely went against the interests of the working class. The major adjustment policy followed by the private as well as public sector has resulted in an increase in the casualisation of labour on a large scale. It also resulted in the redundancy of existing workforce and relocation of units to lower wage areas with temporary workforce. Apart from that companies had resorted to direct reduction of workforce. The industrial units resorted to no new recruitment or replacement, retrenchment, voluntary retirement schemes, increased sub contracting, automation and shut down of departments and closure. This is accompanied by the shift in the government policies away from protection of employment by withdrawing certain pro-labour legal provisions. The result is that the workers are made to work under exploitative conditions without much bargaining power.

The trade union organisation too shows some change in the post-Independence period. Till Independence, political and economic struggles of the trade unions had been directed against imperialist subjugation. After Independence their struggle has been against the employers of labour and it is more specific in its goal. Yet, considerable division exists among the trade unions in terms of control, sector and region of the industries. Much of the resistance in the form of strikes has been generally organised industry wise or region wise. Trade unions have also taken refuse and found support in different political parties. As a result, trade union movement in post-Independence period has been subjected to further divisions and subdivisions.

The process of current industrial restructuring has a negative impact on trade unions. The new management strategies created an atmosphere of job insecurity among the workers and severely curtailed trade union activity. Due to the consequences of liberalisation of the Indian economy as well as closure of sick units and changing pattern of work and organisation, the trade union's influence has come down to lowest possible level, resulting in loss of membership. These developments have posed a serious challenge to trade unions reflecting a deep crisis in their existing structure. In the emerging scene the trade unions also adopted different strategies. Providing a joint trade union platform, formation of unity among public sector Unions, merging of central trade unions, addressing the needs of the unorganised sector are some worth mentioning here. In the present circumstances the trade unions have to adopt new strategies and have to leave behind their confrontationist approach, which depend heavily on agitations and protest which became irrelevant (Radhakrishna, 1998).

Check Your Progress III

i) Identify two important factors, which paved the way for industrialisation in India. Use about three lines.

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ii) List four major fields in which early industrialisation took place. Use about three lines.

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iii) Spell out two factors, which facilitated the growth of professional classes in India.

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iv) What accounts for the growth of petty traders and shopkeepers in India? Use about three lines.

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

Social classes constitute an important segment of social structure in modem India. Social classes have always been present through all ages but the social classes as we see them today in India, had their origins in the British rule.

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Therefore, first of all, we outlined the impact of British rule on the class formation in India. In this connection, we pointed out the creation of new economy in British India. This reflected in the agricultural sector, in the form of introduction of private property in land, new revenue system and the increasing commercialisation of agriculture, which was a consequence of Agrarian Reforms introduced after Independence. The other spheres of this new economy were the growth of trade and commerce, extension of railways, introduction and expansion of industrial enterprises. The development of state and administrative system coupled with modern education were the other important social forces, which shaped the new classes in India. In the process we also pointed to the consequent uneven growth of social classes in different parts and communities of India. We then studied the rural classes in India. We classified them broadly into five divisions, such as, landlords, peasant proprietors, tenants, agricultural labourers and artisans. Each was studied with reference to its emergence and character. Major changes in their composition after Independence were pointed out. Similarly, urban classes were divided into five categories. These comprised commercial and industrial classes, the corporate sector, professional classes, petty traders, shopkeepers and unorganised workers, and working class. They too were studied with reference to their emergence, character and changing situation, in the post-Independence period.

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5.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

i) Social class is a kind of social group, which is neither legally defined nor religiously sanctioned. It has been defined as a stratum of people who share a similar position in society. They are relatively open and anyone who satisfies the basic criteria of wealth and associated style of life, etc. can become its member. Social classes in a society are ranked hierarchically on the basis of primarily wealth and income. Classes are the characteristic features of industrial societies.

ii) Some of the changes that have led to the emergence of social classes in India are: (a) changing land system, (b) trade and commerce, (c) industrialisation, (d) state and administrative system, and (e) modern education.

iii) The uneven growth of social classes took place in two spheres. One was the various parts of India and the other, in the various communities in India.

Check Your Progress II

i) Ryotwari settlement was a settlement made by the British. Under this settlement the ownership of land was vested in the peasants who were the actual cultivators.

ii) Permanent settlement was a settlement made by the British. Under this settlement the right of ownership was conferred on the Zamindars. Their only obligation was to pay a fixed land revenue to the British Government.

iii) The rich peasants are proprietors having considerable landholdings. They are rich enough to hire agricultural labourers to do field work and they generally supervised cultivation. They take personal interest in the management and improvement of their land. In comparison to them, the middle peasants own medium size landholdings. They are self-sufficient and they use only family labour for land cultivation.

Check Your Progress III

i) The two important factors, which paved the way for industrialisation, are introduction of railways and the accumulation of savings.

ii) The four major fields in which the early industrialisation took place are: (a) plantation, (b) cotton, (c) jute, (d) mining.

iii) The factors, which facilitated the growth of professional classes in India, are: (a) trade, commerce and industry, (b) state and administrative system.

iv) Growth of towns and cities, on a large-scale accounts for the growth of petty traders and shopkeepers in India.

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